

Project restores old gravestones

By Michael Knock
Iowa City Press-Citizen

NORTH LIBERTY — Time has not been kind to Lizzie Vorel.

More than 106 years after the North Liberty resident's death, snow, rain, hail and wind have worn away the once-elegant markings on her grave marker in Ridgewood Cemetery. The sandstone obelisk, which stands about four feet high, also has shifted on its base and is tilting noticeably to the east.

But help is on the way. The Penn Township trustees are working to restore some of the older graves in the cemetery to ensure that they continue to

mark the final resting places of some of the area's earliest residents.

"We owed it to the past to paste these stones back together," said Joan Belknap, the Penn Township clerk.

"Some of these people died without children, so there's no one to take responsibility for them."

The project will cost \$1,050 and will be paid out of the trustees' budget.

Care of the cemetery, which saw its first burial in 1850, is one of the most important responsibilities of the trustees. Other duties include providing fire protection and settling fence disputes. The latter once was a lot more important than it is today, according to trustee Jim



Press-Citizen / Matthew Holst

Randy Jones of Iowa Valley Monument resets a headstone Sunday in Ridgewood Cemetery in North Liberty.

Tallman.

"The trustees are the lowest level of government in the state," Tallman said.

"They are the grassroots of government in Iowa."

Tallman said the trustees have wanted to do

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something about the grave markers in Ridgewood Cemetery for some time. Many were damaged in a 1908 windstorm.

Still others simply have cracked under the weight of 150 years of wear.

"Some just need to be resealed," said Randy Jones of Iowa Valley Monument of Cedar Rapids, the company in charge of the restoration work.

"They are so heavy. Some have just started to settle

under the weight."

Tallman said he marked 45 stones that are in need of repair.

Those stones carry the names of some of North Liberty's oldest families, including Linger, Sentman, Stoner and Young.

"A lot of the sandstone markers have broken off halfway or are just laying on the ground," he said. "Others are tipping and just need to be straightened."

Tallman said the trustees publicized the project so that any families who might not want their relative's markers disturbed could speak out.

"I only got a call from one woman," he said. "She said she was happy to see it done."